

"What Is the Gospel?"

This question is answered in few words by the apostle Paul, in Rom. 1:16, 17: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; . . . for therein is the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." But, although the question is answered in so few words, the answer comprehends so much that it will take all eternity to unfold the depth of its meaning.

The above text sets forth two points for our consideration: 1. Salvation from sin; and, 2. The power of God exerted to accomplish that salvation. We will briefly consider them in order.

The apostle says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, because therein the righteousness of God is revealed. This shows that it is the revelation of the righteousness of God, that brings salvation. That salvation has reference solely to sin, is shown in the fact that it is the revelation of the righteousness of God that saves. Now, since unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17), and sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), it is evident that righteousness is obedience to the law of God. The following texts also show it: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." Matt. 1:21. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Tim. 1:15.

Since sin is the transgression of a law, it is evident that to save one from sin, or from the transgression of the law, is the same thing as making and keeping him obedient to the law. Therefore the gospel is the revelation of the power of God to work righteousness in men—to manifest righteousness in their lives. The gospel, therefore, proclaims God's perfect law, and contemplates nothing less than perfect obedience to it. Let it not be overlooked that it requires no less a power than the power of God, to exhibit righteous acts in the lives of men. Man's power is wholly inadequate. This is easily seen when we recognize what the righteousness is, that is to be revealed in the life. The text says that it is "the righteousness of God." The righteousness of God is set forth in His law. Isa. 51:6, 7. Now who can do the righteousness of God? That is, who can do acts that are as righteous as those that God does?—Evidently only God Himself. The law of God sets forth God's way. Ps. 119:1, 2. But the Lord says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isa. 55:9. Therefore man's effort to keep the commandments of God must fall as far short as the earth is lower than the heavens.

Man is fallen; the work of the gospel is to raise him to a place at the right hand of God. But can man lift himself from earth to heaven? A man can as easily raise himself from the ground to the sun, by placing his hands under the soles of his feet and lifting, as he can raise himself by his own actions to the height of the requirement of God's commandments. Everyone knows that when a man tries to lift himself by placing his hands under his feet, he is only holding himself down, and that the harder he lifts, the

more he presses downward. So it is with all of man's efforts to make himself what God's law demands. He is only adding to his guilt, for "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Isa. 64:6. That which man does himself is from self; that is, it is selfishness; and selfishness has no place in the plan of salvation. That which is of self is of Satan; it is wholly evil. See Mark 7:21-23. The gospel proposes to save man from himself; therefore the man who proposes to do either wholly or in part by himself the work that God requires, proposes to do the best he can to thwart God's plan. Many do this ignorantly, but the result is the same. It was because the Jews were ignorant of God's righteousness that they went about to establish their own righteousness. Rom. 10:1-3. Whoever realizes the infinite depth and height and breadth of the character of God, which is summed up in His law, will readily see that nothing short of the power of God can produce that character in man. Only God Himself can do the works of God. For a man to assume that he himself is able to do God's righteous works, is to make himself equal with God; and that is the very "mystery of iniquity" itself.

The work of the gospel, then, is to put God's righteous works in the place of man's unrighteousness. It is to work in man the works of God, and to cause him to think the thoughts of God. It is to save him from all unrighteousness, to deliver him from "this present evil world," to redeem him from all iniquity; that is the result; by what means is it to be accomplished?—By the power of God. We must know, then, what that power is, and how it is applied.

Immediately following the statement that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, the apostle tells us how we may know the power. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." Rom. 1:20. That is, God's power is seen in the things that He has made. Creation reveals the power of God, for His power is creative power. The fact that God creates is that which distinguishes Him as the one true God. The psalmist says: "For the Lord [Jehovah] is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols [nothing]: but the Lord made the heavens." Ps. 96:4, 5.

Again we read: "The Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting King: at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion. When He uttereth His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures." Jer. 10:10-13.

Ps. 33:6, 9, tells us how the Lord made the heavens and the earth: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." "For He spake, and it was; He commanded, and it stood fast." It was made *by His word*. When God speaks, the very thing itself exists in the words which describe or name the

thing. Thus it is that He "calleth those things which be not as though they were." Rom. 4:17. If man should call a thing that is not as though it were, it would be a lie; but not so when God so speaks, for His very word causes it to be. When He speaks the word, there the thing is. "He spake, and it was."

The same word that creates also upholds. In Heb. 1:3 we read that Christ, who created all things, upholds all things "by the word of His power." Also the apostle Peter tells us that "there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst [*through*, margin,] water, by the word of God: by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, *by the same word* have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." 2 Pet. 3:5-7, Revised Version. The creative power of the word of God is seen in the preservation of the earth and the heavenly bodies, and in the growth of all plants. To the same effect are the words of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah: "To whom, then, will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth." Isa. 40:25, 26.

The reason why this is so is found in the fact that the word of God is living; being the breath of God, it has the incorruptible nature of God, so that its power never diminishes. The fortieth chapter of Isaiah is wholly devoted to showing the power of God, a sample of which we have just quoted. The word by which all these things are upheld is those spoken of in verses 7, 8: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but *the word of our God shall stand forever.*" The apostle Peter quotes these words, and adds: "*This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*" 1 Pet. 1:25.

Thus we are brought around again to the statement that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. But the power of God is shown in creating and upholding the earth; therefore the gospel is the creative power of God exercised for the salvation of man from sin. So the apostle says: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God." 2 Cor. 5:17, 18. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10. The work of redemption is the work of producing a new creation—new men, new heavens, and new earth—by the same word that created all things in the beginning.

What greater encouragement can God give us than this, namely, that the power that works in us that which is well-pleasing in the sight of the Lord, is the power that made the heavens and the earth, and which upholds them! Need there be any discouragement? To carry out this thought, as set forth in the Scriptures, would require a volume; but we will read a few texts that will set us on the track of contemplating God's power in creation, and rejoicing in it.

The psalmist says: "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." Ps. 62:11, 12. Here we see the mercy of God coupled with His power. Now read through the whole of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, and as you read the description of God's wonderful power, bear in mind the first verse: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." And then at the close read: "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." By what power?—By the power that created the earth from nothing, and which preserves it. What is the comfort of God's people?—It is the knowledge that their God is mighty in power, even to creating and upholding the universe.

Read also Col. 1:9-18, and note how redemption and the creation of all the universe are linked together. We have redemption through the blood of Christ, because "by Him were all things were created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church." Surely the church ought to be strong, when it is connected with so powerful a head. It is only as men through unbelief become disconnected with the head, that they are weak.

Verse 11, of the passage referred to, reads thus: "Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." In the revision this is more literally rendered thus: "Strengthened [margin, *made powerful*] with all power, according to the might of His glory." Now read Ps. 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork." That is, the heavens declare the power of the glory of God, by which we are strengthened in the conflict with sin and Satan.

Now turn to Ps. 111:2-4, and read: "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious; and His righteousness endureth forever. He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and full of compassion." Yes, the Lord is gracious and compassionate according to the power exhibited in the works of His hands. "He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." And that mercy is equal to the power that made the heavens and the earth. Yea, it *is* that power; for God Himself, the mighty God, is love.

But what shall we say more? Time would fail us to recount the power and the mercy of God. When we meditate on the law of God, as we are exhorted to do day and night, and find therein such wondrous things that our soul faints at the thought that all that righteousness must be exhibited in our lives, let us also lift up our eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath, and then with rejoicing say: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Ps. 124:8. Yea, let all who suffer according to

the will of God, "commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." 1 Pet. 4:19. Remember that He who upholds all things by the word of His power, is "able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy." Jude 24.

"Beneath His watchful eye
His saints securely dwell;
That hand which bears all nature up
Shall guard His children well."

"Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, *according to the power that worketh in us*, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Eph. 3:20, 21. Surely, "happy is that people, whose God is Jehovah."

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The Present Truth, Vol. 8, No. 2, January 28, 1892, pp. 24-26.

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